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Pressure-induced Fe↔Cu cationic valence exchange and its structural consequences: High-pressure studies of delafossite CuFeO₂

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The present high-pressure studies of CuFeO₂ to 30 GPa using x-ray diffraction, along with ⁵⁷Fe Mössbauer and Fe and Cu *K*-edge x-ray absorption spectroscopy methods, reveal a sequence of intricate structural/ electronic-magnetic pressure-induced transitions. The low-pressure $R\bar{3}m$ structure (0–18 GPa) is composed of sheets of Fe³⁺_{S=5/2} ions alternating with layers of O-Cu¹⁺_{S=0}-O dumbbells, the latter oriented along the *c* axis. This structure is characterized by an unusual positive d(c/a)/dP. At 18 GPa a structural transition takes place to a more isotropic C2/c structure with the O-Cu¹⁺_{S=0}-O axis tilted 28° from the *c* axis and with negative d(c/a)/dP. This transition corroborates with the onset of long-range antiferromagnetic order. Starting at ~23 GPa, with an initial volume reduction in $\sim |\Delta V/V_0| = 0.16$, the Cu-Fe bands overlap and this leads to a $(Cu^{1+}_{S=0}Fe^{3+}_{S=5/2})$ $\rightarrow (Cu^{2+}_{S=1/2}Fe^{2+}_{S=2})$ interionic valence exchange in about 1/3 of the C2/c-CuFeO₂ at 27 GPa. As a result: (i) the Cu²⁺-O becomes fourfold coordinated and is in a new crystallographic structure with space group $P\bar{3}m$, and (ii) the Néel temperature increases above twofold $[T_N(Cu^{2+}_{S=1/2}Fe^{2+}_{S=2})\approx 2.2T_N(Cu^{1+}_{S=0}Fe^{3+}_{S=5/2})]$. This sequence of transitions is reversible with minimal hysteresis.

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of diamond-anvil pressure cells during the past two decades,¹ we have witnessed many discoveries about compressed materials. The transition-metal compounds, Mott-Hubbard insulators,² and particularly the iron (Fe²⁺ and Fe³⁺) containing oxides, have revealed major changes under pressure, including high- to low-spin transitions (spin crossovers) (Ref. 3) caused by the strong dependency of the crystal field 10Dq on interatomic distance r $[\sim 1/r^n, 4 < n < 6 \text{ (Ref. 4)}]$. With pressures reaching mechanical energy densities $(E_{\rm M}/V)$ comparable to the Coulombic $(E_{\rm C}/V)$ energy density, strong *d*-*d* electronic correlations present at low pressures can break down, leading to an abrupt insulator-metal transition accompanied by the collapse of the magnetic moment.⁵ In addition, we have documented pressure-induced *self-oxidation* of Fe²⁺ in $Fe(OH)_2$: $Fe^{2+} \rightarrow Fe^{3+} + e^{-}$, creating a one-electron band

within the framework of the "oxidized" hydroxide. This valence transformation is isostructural and is not fully reversible upon decompression.⁶

In the present case, we describe a reversible oxidationreduction transition in the antiferromagnetic insulator CuFeO₂ (delafossite) triggered by a sequence of structural phase transitions under pressure. At ambient conditions, delafossite crystallizes in the $R\bar{3}m$ structure consisting of hexagonal layers of Cu¹⁺, Fe³⁺, and O²⁻ with a stacking sequence of A-B-C [A(Cu), A(O), B(Fe), C(O), C(Cu), C(O), A(Fe), etc.] along the *c* axis to form a layered triangular lattice (Fig. 1, inset).⁷ The triangular sublattices of antiferromagnetic Fe³⁺(S=5/2) moments are separated by layers of nonmagnetic Cu¹⁺(S=0) and O²⁻. Early high-pressure x-ray diffraction studies by Zhao *et al.*⁸ found no indications of structural phase transitions to 10 GPa but reported a significant increase in c/a with increasing pressure. This unusual

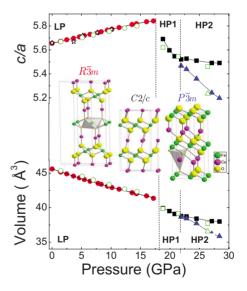


FIG. 1. (Color online) Pressure dependence of the unit-cell volume and crystal anisotropy reflected by the c/a ratio at RT. The solid line through V(P) is the theoretical fit for the LP phase using the Birch-Murnaghan formula for the equation of state. Circles correspond to the $R\overline{3}m$ phase, squares to the C2/c, and triangles to the $P\overline{3}m$ structures. The *open* points correspond to data recorded at decompression. The stars for c/a(P) are from Ref. 8. The discontinuous decrease in c/a and V occurs at the onset of the HP1 phase. The $R\overline{3}m$, C2/c, and the $P\overline{3}m$ crystal structures are shown in the inset.

pressure-induced anisotropy combined with highly frustrated spin properties both between and within layers⁹ has motivated our recent ⁵⁷Fe Mössbauer studies to 19 GPa (Xu *et al.*¹⁰). Among the findings was that only for $P \ge 18$ GPa is long-range antiferromagnetic order stabilized at $T < T_{\rm N}$ (~40 K at 19 GPa).

With further pressure increase an abrupt valence transition was observed by 57 Fe Mössbauer spectroscopy (MS) at pres-

sures of 24–27 GPa, namely,
$$\operatorname{Fe}^{3+}(S=5/2) \rightleftharpoons^{P} \operatorname{Fe}^{2+}(S=2)$$
, in

which part of the Fe³⁺ is transformed into a new magnetic Fe²⁺ sublattice. This finding was the main motivation of the present work. In order to elucidate the nature of this pressure-induced *reduction* in a large fraction of the Fe³⁺ ions, we carried out additional ⁵⁷Fe Mössbauer studies, x-ray diffraction (XRD) studies, and x-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) at the Fe and Cu *K* edges, the latter to test the possi-

bility of a concurrent $Cu^{1+}(S=0) \rightleftharpoons Cu^{2+}(S=1/2)$ transition.

The combined methods lead to a comprehensive portrayal of the high-pressure phases of $CuFeO_2$.

II. EXPERIMENTAL

CuFeO₂ was synthesized by direct solid-solid reaction of Fe₂O₃ and Cu₂O.¹¹ Mössbauer samples were prepared with Fe₂O₃ enriched in 20% of ⁵⁷Fe. XRD and XAS were carried out at room temperature (RT) and the MS in the 5–300 K range and pressures to 30 GPa. Pressure was generated with *opposing plates* diamond-anvil cells using anvils with 300 μ m culets. Argon or helium was used as a pressurizing medium.

Mössbauer studies were performed using a ⁵⁷Co (Rh) point source in a variable temperature (5–300 K) cryostat. Spectra were analyzed using a spin-Hamiltonian fitting program assuming $e^2q_{zz}Q/4I(2I-1) \ll \mu H_{hyp}/I$ from which the isomer shift (IS), the quadrupole splitting (QS), the hyperfine field (H_{hf}) and the relative abundances of the spectral components were deduced. Due to the high ⁵⁷Fe isotopic enrichment (20%) typical line widths were as high as 0.35 mm/s.

XRD was performed in angle-dispersive mode at the ID09A beamline of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, Grenoble, with patterns collected using a MAR345 detector and integrated using the FIT2D program.¹² Two sets of measurements were obtained, using wavelengths λ =0.41761 and 0.41336 Å, and the results analyzed by Rietveld refinement using the GSAS package.¹³

XAS was performed at the energy-dispersive beamline ID24 of ESRF employing a Si(220) polychromator and three Si mirrors for harmonic rejection and vertical focusing.¹⁴ The focal spot was $\sim 5 \times 5 \ \mu$ m full width at half maximum and use of partially perforated anvils¹⁵ substantially reduced absorption of the Cu and Fe *K* x rays by the diamonds. The results were analyzed through comparison with x-ray spectra calculated using the *ab initio* self-consistent real-space multiple-scattering code FEFF8.4.¹⁶ An energy-dependent exchange-correlation Hedin-Lundqvist potential was used

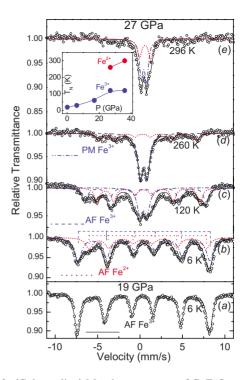


FIG. 2. (Color online) Mössbauer spectra of CuFeO₂ recorded at 19 and 27 GPa: typical absorption spectrum of the 19-23 GPa range (C2/c structure) at 6 K (a) characterized by a single magnetic Fe³⁺ component with parameter values within the range observed for ferric oxides. Spectra typical for 24-30 GPa range recorded at various temperatures are shown in (b)-(e). The fitted solid line through the experimental points is a convolution of two spectral components: At 6 K (b) the spectrum is composed of two magnetic components: Fe³⁺ and a new one with $H_{\rm hf}$ and IS characteristic of Fe²⁺ oxides; (c) at 120 K one observes the collapse of the magnetic order of the Fe³⁺ component, showing a central peak representing the fast spin-spin relaxation typical of the $T \sim T_N$ regime; at 260 K (d) the Fe²⁺ magnetic splitting is still observed albeit with reduced $H_{\rm hf}$ (=36 T); and at RT (e) the paramagnetic quadrupole-split components of Fe³⁺ and Fe²⁺ are the only ones left. The solid line is a result of fitting to two quadrupole-split components (Fe³⁺ and Fe²⁺) with relative abundance of 2/1 (Ref. 26). The inset summarizes the $T_{\rm N}(P)$ of the two Fe species, Fe³⁺ and Fe²⁺.

within the muffin-tin approximation, and self-consistency was obtained by successively calculating the electron density of states, electron density and Fermi level within a cluster of 50 atoms and then iterating. Full multiple-scattering calculations up to photoelectron energy of about 60 eV were carried out for a larger cluster of 150 atoms centered on the photoabsorber, and a constant experimental broadening of 0.5 eV and an offset in the energy scale of -5.5 eV were added.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Typical Mössbauer spectra recorded at 19–23 GPa range at 6 K and at 24–30 GPa range in the 5–300 K range are shown in Fig. 2. The 19 GPa spectrum corresponds to a single-site Fe³⁺ magnetic hyperfine field ($H_{\rm hf}$) of 48(2) T with IS=0.34(2) mm/s.¹⁷ $T_{\rm N}$ at this pressure is 38(3) K as obtained from a series of $H_{\rm hyf}^{19}$ GPa(T) measurements.¹⁰ With increasing pressure, above 24 GPa, a new magnetic hyperfine component appears with parameters values [IS =0.63(2) mm/s and $H_{\rm hf}$ =42(2) T] that can be unambiguously attributed to a high-spin Fe²⁺ (Ref. 18) at such pressures. With increasing temperature $H_{\rm bf}(T)$ values of both components decrease, signaling the decrease in magnetization of both species while approaching their corresponding $T_{\rm N}$. At 120 K, the quadrupole-split paramagnetic component attributed to paramagnetic relaxation of Fe³⁺ (centered at $v \sim 0$ mm/s), is typical of the $T \sim T_N$ regime at high pressure (see, for example, Ref. 3); and at 260 K the only magnetic component remaining is that of Fe^{2+} with H_{hf} =36(2) T whereas the quadrupole-split central component originates from paramagnetic Fe^{3+} with a Fe^{3+}/Fe^{2+} abundance ratio of 2/1. Finally, at room temperature (T_N) < 300 K), both the ferric and ferrous quadrupole-split components are paramagnetic with $QS(Fe^{3+})=0.72(2)$ mm/s, $IS(Fe^{3+})=0.39(2)$ mm/s, $QS(Fe^{2+})=1.00(2)$ mm/s, and $IS(Fe^{2+})=0.61(2)$ mm/s. T_N of both iron species increase with pressure (inset in Fig. 2), typical for antiferromagnetic Mott-Hubbard insulators. Thus we infer that above 24 GPa two Cu-Fe species are present: $Cu^{1+}Fe^{3+}O_2$ [T_N =130(10) K] and Cu²⁺Fe²⁺O₂ [T_N =280(20) K], the latter composed of two magnetic sublattices, $Cu^{2+}(S=1/2)$ and $Fe^{2+}(S=2)$. Mössbauer spectra obtained with reducing pressure showed no hysteresis suggesting that electronic/ magnetic pressure-induced transitions are reversible.

XRD patterns obtained at various pressures are shown in Fig. 3. Up to 18 GPa, the low-pressure (LP) regime, spectra are well fitted assuming the ambient-pressure space group $R\overline{3}m$.⁸ A spectrum typical of this phase is shown in Fig. 3(a). At $P \approx 18$ GPa a first-order transition takes place characterized by a symmetry change, volume and c axis drop and reversal of the c/a slope. Within the 18–22 GPa range the diffraction patterns are satisfactorily fitted with space group C2/c [Fig. 3(b)] with the weighted residual and residual agreement factors wRp < 1.3% and Rp < 1%, respectively.¹⁹ This phase is designated as the *high-pressure 1* (HP1) phase. Similar to R3m it is also a layered hexagonal structure that is obtained by layers displaced in the *ab* plane, resulting in a tilt of the rigid O-Cu-O "dumbbells" by $\sim 28^{\circ}$ relative to the c axis (Fig. 1). Above 22 GPa domains of an additional structure appear arising from the C2/c structure, as evident from splitting of the (004) peak and broadening of other peaks except (hk0) [Fig. 3(c)]. This partial transformation can be explained by an additional displacement of part of the Cu and O layers in the *ab* plane resulting in a different stacking sequence to form $P\bar{3}m$ domains (see Fig. 1) coexisting with C2/c domains. This new phase is designated as the highpressure 2 (HP2) phase, in which CuFeO₂ is comprised of $P\overline{3}m$ and C2/c clusters. Patterns of the HP2 phase were correspondingly fitted with this assumption and the quality of the fitting can be appreciated by the derived small values of wRp(<1.1%) and Rp(<0.7%).

The derived V(P) and (c/a)(P) graphs are shown in Fig. 1. The V(P) data for the LP phase (Fig. 1) are well fitted with a second-order Birch-Murnaghan equation²⁰ with the following parameters: $K_0=148.0(0.7)$ GPa, $K'_0=4$ (fixed), and V_0 =45.64(0.01) Å³, where K_0 , K'_0 , and V_0 are the bulk modu-

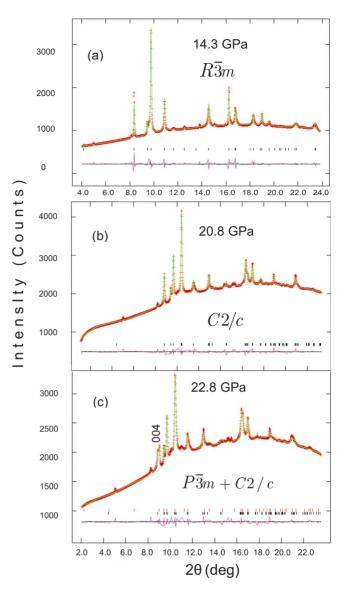


FIG. 3. (Color online) Typical examples of analyzed integrated patterns of XRD spectra collected at 14.3, 20.8, and 22.8 GPa at RT and the differences between the observed and calculated profiles. Marks show the calculated peak positions. The 14.3 GPa spectrum corresponds to the LP phase with $R\bar{3}m$ symmetry, extending from ambient pressure to 18 GPa. At 19–22 GPa the symmetry group is C2/c and at P > 22 GPa CuFeO₂ is comprised of both C2/C and $P\bar{3}m$ domains.

lus, its pressure derivative, and the unit-cell volume at ambient conditions, respectively. As can be seen, (c/a)(P) increases beyond 10 GPa, the last pressure point measured by Zhao *et al.*,⁸ culminating at 18 GPa with a total increase of ~3% with respect to ambient pressure. This large increase in anisotropy is evidently unstable, and at P > 18 GPa a structural LP \rightarrow HP1 phase transition takes place accompanied by a discontinuous volume decrease ($\Delta V/V_{18 \text{ GPa}} \sim 0.03$), increase in dV/dP, a large drop in c/a and a reversal in its pressure derivative from positive to negative, signaling the collapse of the high axial anisotropy in CuFeO₂. Within the HP1 C2/c phase, the 28° tilt of the O-Cu-O bonds with respect to the *c* axis apparently exposes the CuO₂ to soft

TABLE I.	The Fe-O and Cu-O mean value distances (Å) a	t
various pressu	res within the $R\overline{3}m$, $C2/c$, and the $P\overline{3}m$ phases.	
P		=

P		
(GPa)	Fe-O	Cu-O
	$R\overline{3}m$ phase (Cu ¹⁺ Fe ³⁺	O ₂)
1.4	2.033(5)	1.815(1)
6.4	2.010(4)	1.809(1)
11.4	1.991(4)	1.805 (1)
17.2	1.970(2)	1.799(4)
	C2/c phase (Cu ¹⁺ Fe ³⁺	O ₂)
18.8	1.967(1)	1.901(1)
21.9	1.952(2)	1.855(2)
24.5	1.946(1)	1.847(1)
28.4	1.939(1)	1.838(1)
	$P\overline{3}m$ phase (Cu ²⁺ Fe ²⁺	O ₂)
21.9	2.057(3)	1.944(3)
24.5	2.041(1)	1.925(1)
28.4	2.008(8)	1.887(7)

bending modes, causing a reduction in c/a values and bulk modulus as compared with the $R\overline{3}m$ structure. This structural phase transition stabilizes the long-range antiferromagnetic order²¹ but has no observable effect on the valence state of Fe as evident from the Mössbauer spectra.

With further pressure increase and consequent volume decrease in CuFeO₂ in its C2/c configuration, Cu¹⁺(3d¹⁰) and Fe³⁺(3d⁵) bands overlap at $\sim |\Delta V/V_0| = 0.16$ (23 GPa) resulting in an intercationic charge exchange, and leading to a valence transformation in parts of the Cu and Fe constituents: $Cu^{1+}(\rightarrow Cu^{2+})$ and $Fe^{3+}(\rightarrow Fe^{2+})$.²² The $Cu^{1+}\rightarrow Cu^{2+}$ transition, particularly, has dramatic consequences for the stability of the C2/c phase, with an onset of Cu²⁺-O bonding with fourfold coordination instead of the twofold O-Cu-O dumbbell-like bonding. The four-coordinated Cu²⁺ species cannot be accommodated within the C2/c framework, and as a result, domains of the $P\overline{3}m$ structure appear characterized by the formation of tetrahedral CuO_4 distorted along the c direction (see Fig. 1). Accordingly, at the HP1-HP2 boundary V(P) and (c/a)(P) branch into two curves corresponding to the $P\overline{3}m$ and C2/c domains.

Typical Fe-O and Cu-O mean value distances for the $R\bar{3}m$, C2/c, and the $P\bar{3}m$ phases as obtained from the XRD results are shown in Table I. It is noteworthy that the Fe-O distances differ within the C2/c and $P\bar{3}m$ structures, for the same pressure values, although Fe remains sixfold coordinated: the larger Fe-O distance in the $P\bar{3}m$ phase is consistent with the larger ionic radius of Fe due to the Fe³⁺ \leftrightarrow Fe²⁺ valence transformation. The larger value of the Cu-O distance in the $P\bar{3}m$ phase with respect to the C2/c phase results from the combined effect of the expansion of the Cu-O bond due to the Cu coordination change from 2 (C2/c) to 4

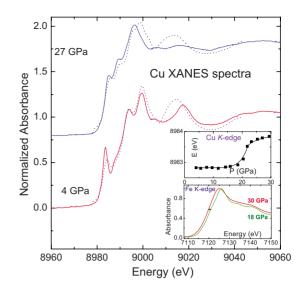


FIG. 4. (Color online) XANES spectra at Cu *K* edge at RT. Simulations (dotted lines) were based on the assumption of the $R\bar{3}m$ space group for the data at 4 GPa, and of a coexistence of C2/c and $P\bar{3}m$ with an abundance ratio of 2:1 for the data at 27 GPa. The top inset shows the energy of the Cu *K*-edge absorption onset as a function of pressure. The bottom inset shows Fe *K*-edge spectra at 18 and 30 GPa. With the appearance of Cu²⁺ the Cu *K*-edge absorption onset increases by ~1 eV, whereas the Fe *K*-edge absorption onset shows a negative shift of comparable magnitude.

 $(P\bar{3}m)$, and of the slight contraction of the Cu ionic radius due to the Cu¹⁺ \leftrightarrow Cu²⁺ valence transformation.²³

Cu K-edge x-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) spectra are shown in Fig. 4. We compare the normalized experimental data (continuous line) to ab initio simulations (dotted line) based on the $R\overline{3}m$ phase for the data at 4 GPa (bottom) and on a combination of C2/c and $P\overline{3}m$ phases with 2:1 relative abundance for the data at 27 GPa (top). Upon pressure increase, the modifications of the spectral features close to the absorption edge are well reproduced by the simulations. The Cu absorption edge shifts by about +1 eV in the 20-30 GPa range, whereas the iron edge exhibits a negative shift (see insets in Fig. 4). Given that within the family of pure iron and copper oxides the energy of the x-ray absorption edge increases with increasing valence at constant pressure,^{24,25} our XANES data are consistent with a valence transformation $Cu^{1+} \rightarrow Cu^{2+}$ and $Fe^{3+} \rightarrow Fe^{2+}$ in part of the Cu and Fe sites. Thus, the x-ray spectroscopic and diffraction results support our interpretation of the Mössbauer data as reflecting the following electronic transition,

$$\begin{bmatrix} Cu_{(S=0)}^{1+} Fe_{(S=5/2)}^{3+} O_2 \end{bmatrix} \xrightarrow{P \ge 23 \text{ GPa}} x[Cu_{(S=1/2)}^{2+} Fe_{(S=2)}^{2+} O_2] + (1-x) \times \begin{bmatrix} Cu_{(S=0)}^{1+} Fe_{(S=5/2)}^{3+} O_2 \end{bmatrix}.$$
(1)

The appearance of Cu²⁺ (3*d*⁹, *S*=1/2) paramagnetic sublattices significantly affects the magnetic properties of CuFeO₂ above 22 GPa: the "weak" $Fe_{S=5/2}^{3+}$ -O-Cu¹⁺_{S=0}-O-Fe³⁺_{S=5/2} superexchange paths are replaced by a "robust" $Fe_{S=2}^{2+}$ -O-Cu²⁺_{S=1/2}-O-Fe²⁺_{S=2} superexchange, composed now of a paramagnetic Cu²⁺ sublattice and leading to an enhanced $T_{\rm N}$ that jumps more than twofold (from 130 to 280 K) at 27 GPa. With further pressure increase, $T_{\rm N}^{P\bar{3}m}(P)$ increases rapidly and reaches 300 K at 36 GPa whereas $T_{\rm N}^{C2/c}(P)$ barely changes (Fig. 2, inset). This can be explained as due to the higher compressibility of the $P\bar{3}m$ phase in comparison with the C2/c phase (see Fig. 1).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the observed series of intertwined structural, electronic, and magnetic changes in CuFeO₂ include the structural instability of the $R\bar{3}m$ lattice beyond 18 GPa, resulting in a more stable C2/c structure. Above 23 GPa part of the C2/c transforms into $P\bar{3}m$ structure in which Fe-Cu intersite charge transfer occurs. This series of transitions may not be completed at the HP2 phase (comprised of $P\bar{3}m$ and PHYSICAL REVIEW B 81, 104110 (2010)

C2/c domains). It can be expected that with further pressure increase CuFeO₂ will be fully transformed to $P\overline{3}m$ or to another energetically stable structure. The observed *intersite* charge transfer is accompanied by considerable changes in the material's elastic and magnetic properties, and the transitions are completely reversible with no noticeable hysteresis in pressure.

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- ¹⁹ $Rp = \Sigma |I_o I_c| / \Sigma I_o$ and $wRp = \text{sqrt} \{ \Sigma w (I_o I_c)^2) / \Sigma w I_o^2 \}$, where I_o and I_c are observed and calculated profile values. For more details see Ref. 13.
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- ²¹Noteworthy that at ambient pressure on cooling from room temperature, CuFeO₂ undergoes antiferromagnetic transition at 11 K which is accompanied by structural phase transitions to monoclinic C2/m structure [F. Ye, Y. Ren, Q. Huang, J. A. Fernandez-Baca, Pengcheng Dai, J. W. Lynn, and T. Kimura, Phys. Rev. B **73**, 220404 (2006)]. In contrast to the present case only slight monoclinic distortion of the original hexagonal R3m structure is observed in this case.
- ²²We note that there is a slight difference in determining the pressure limits of HP1 and HP2 between the XRD and MS studies. Differences may arise from the higher sensitivity of the synchrotron XRD method, where the higher signal/noise allows detection of new components at a level where its relative abundance is too small for MS. The different geometry of the signal collection also can play a role: the pressure is measured usually in the center of the hole, in the XRD measurements the signal derives also from a small central part of the sample, whereas in MS studies the signal is collected from a larger part of the sample ($\sim 2/3$) resulting in possible pressure gradient effects.
- 23 According to R. D. Shannon, Acta Crystallogr., Sect. A **32**, 751 (1976) the ionic radii at ambient conditions of Fe²⁺(VI) and Fe³⁺(VI) are 0.78 Å and 0.645 Å and of Cu²⁺(IV) and Cu¹⁺(II) are 0.57 Å and 0.46 Å, respectively.
- ²⁴ The Fe K-edge position moves toward higher energies with increasing Fe valence within the family of iron oxides FeO, Fe₂O₃, and Fe₃O₄: see M. Newville, S. A. Carroll, P. A. O'Day, G. A. Waychunas, and M. Ebert, J. Synchrotron Radiat. 6, 276 (1999).
- ²⁵K. Akeyama, H. Kuroda, and N. Kosugi, Jpn. J. Appl. Phys., Suppl. **32**, 98 (1992).
- ²⁶The two doublet components are slightly asymmetric due to the texture effect induced by pressure.